

# THE COMEDIC LADDER

## English IV AP

“When we laugh at ourselves, we look at ourselves.”

### KEEP A FEW THINGS ABOUT LADDERS IN MIND:

- Ladders are all about moving.
- Ladders begin at the bottom.
- When one ascends a ladder, one steps on every rung.

### COMEDY OF IDEAS- Laughing at the Implications of Ideas (high comedy)

In comedy of ideas, the characters argue ideas or are representative of people who hold these ideas. The action represents ideas in conflict using characters as personalities.

1. Arguments about ideas like politics, religion, sex, marriage.
2. They use their wit, their clever language to mock their opponent in an argument.
3. This is a subtle way to satirize people and institutions like political parties, governments, churches, war, marriage.

### COMEDY OF MANNERS- Laughing at Words (high comedy)

Comedy of manners emphasizes the mechanism of language and reduces life to verbal wit. The action magnifies faults mainly through dialogue.

1. The dialogue focuses on witty language. Clever speech, insults and ‘put-downs’ are traded between characters.
2. Society is often made up of cliques that are exclusive with certain groups as the in-crowd (witty), other groups (the would-be-wits, desiring to be part of the witty crowd), and some (the witless) on the outside.

### FARCE- Laughing at Situations

In farce, the characters are puppets of fate. This type of comedy is most easily identified by the devices that drive the (predictably improbable) plot: mistaken identity, coincidences, and mis-timings.

### LOW COMEDY- Laughing at People

At the bottom of the comedic ladder, man is almost indistinguishable from animal. At its base, low comedy reduces everything to its lowest common denominator.

1. Subjects of the humor consist of dirty jokes, dirty gestures, sex, and bathroom humor.
2. The extremes of humor range from exaggeration to understatement with a focus on the physical like long noses, crossed eyes, humped back and deformities.
3. The physical actions revolve around slapstick, pratfalls, loud noises, physical mishaps, collisions—all part of the humor of man encountering an uncooperative universe.